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What's Next for D.C. Associate Salaries?

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The early days of the associate-salary war resembled the frenetic call-and-response often found at a concert.

And so, too, did the heavy rhythm and drumming coming from Washington, D.C., firms wanting to be seen and heard rising to a challenge to prove they have muscle in the market.

But in the second week after Hogan & Hartson and O'Melveny & Myers established a \$145,000 target for paying first-years, the audible response waned.

But only briefly.

Then, in a Friday afternoon cacophony, several firms, such as Arnold & Porter; Latham & Watkins; Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher; and Sidley Austin, shattered the deafening silence.

For most of last week, California-based Latham and Gibson (which last year was one of the first firms to raise salaries) had been hunkered down in a Cold War-era game of Mutual Assured Destruction, waiting for the other to launch first.

Then on Friday Latham struck, hiking starting salaries up to \$145,000. Within minutes, Gibson matched; just a couple of ICBMs passing in the sky.

Several D.C.-based firms, including WilmerHale, Covington & Burling, Steptoe & Johnson, Patton Boggs and Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld, also bumped pay, all matching the first-year number of \$145,000.

What's driving the action -- and, conversely, the inaction -- depends on the "market," which firms define as a confluence of practice, city, and competitor pay. For instance, Finnegan, Henderson, Farabow, Garrett & Dunner (which has yet to move its first-years' salary from \$135,000) is certainly keeping an eye on what everyone is doing, but most important in its worldview is what other IP firms are paying, putting Fish & Richardson's raise to \$160,000 squarely on their radar.

Of course, the major firms that haven't moved are becoming more conspicuous: Dickstein Shapiro, Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman, Wiley Rein, Crowell & Moring and Howrey. All are local powers and stalwarts on the *Legal Times* D.C. 20.

Dickstein Chairman Michael Nannes says he's confident the firm will change its starting number to \$145,000 and make it retroactive. And rest assured that it'll be done with all the attendant clamor.

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